

Seattle Office for Civil Rights

2004 - 2005
Annual Report

Equal rights and social justice for all Seattle



*Race and
social justice*

*Civil rights
enforcement*

*Policy and
outreach*

**The Seattle Office
for Civil Rights
promotes racial
and social justice for
everyone in Seattle.**

**At SOCR, we envision
a city where all people
enjoy equal rights,
equal opportunity
and freedom from
illegal discrimination.**

A Message from the Director



In 2004, Seattle Mayor Greg Nickels asked the Seattle Office for Civil Rights (SOCR) to coordinate his new Race and Social Justice Initiative. The Initiative's goal was ambitious: to end institutionalized racism in Seattle City government and to create a community that is enriched by its diverse cultures, with full participation by all its residents.

I knew that taking on such a huge assignment would impact our day-to-day activities as a civil rights office. But I did not anticipate how it would cause me to re-examine our vision and to dedicate renewed energy to the larger struggle of achieving social justice in the United States.

SOCR is one of dozens of civil rights enforcement agencies across the country, operating under laws first crafted nearly forty years ago. Those laws give individuals a place to seek redress if they believe they were discriminated against in housing, employment and public places. They also protect the rights of all parties by ensuring that our investigations are neutral and based on evidence.

Laws to protect people are important, but they cannot change hearts and minds. In my twelve years as director of SOCR, I have come to understand more clearly the limitation of laws. Don't get me wrong – our civil rights statutes are absolutely essential. But helping individuals one case at a time won't end discrimination. For that we need to change the system that shapes hearts and minds.

Broader systemic change means looking at the underlying structures of our institutions, the space where discrimination lives and breathes. Investigating charges of illegal discrimination remains critical, but it is only one strategy among many to work for social justice – and it is only part of what we do at SOCR. Our impact far exceeds our small size, thanks both to the extraordinary commitment of our staff and to our partnerships with community leaders, advocacy organizations and business groups. I hope you'll take a few minutes to learn more about SOCR by reading this report. If you have questions, I invite you to contact us for more information or visit our website, www.seattle.gov/civilrights.

Working for social justice requires a long-term vision.

We recognize that our system of inequality has taken hundreds of years to establish. It will take a lasting commitment to create positive permanent change. Working together, we can make that change.

Germaine W. Covington

Germaine W. Covington,
Director of Seattle Office for Civil Rights



Civil Rights Enforcement

The Seattle Office for Civil Rights enforces the City's anti-discrimination laws in housing, employment, public accommodations and contracting. When someone files a charge of illegal discrimination with SOCR, we conduct an investigation and issue a finding based on the evidence.

Negotiated settlements yield record settlement compensation

In 2005, charging parties received the highest total dollar compensation in SOCR's history: \$91,561.50, an increase of \$66,111.88 over dollar compensation in 2003.

SOCR helps people involved in discrimination charges settle their cases through face-to-face negotiation. SOCR uses the City of Seattle's Alternative Dispute Resolution Program to bring charging parties and respondents together for settlement discussions, and we are developing capacity in-house to handle more face-to-face negotiations between charging parties and respondents. Negotiated settlements help everyone involved find solutions that fit their specific situations. As part of settlements, respondents often receive training that helps them avoid similar issues in the future.



Cases closed by protected class

	2004	2005
Race	83	71
Disability	55	68
Retaliation	29	33
National Origin	28	30
Sex	27	24
Section 8	13	10
Use of service animal	11	14
Age	10	12
Sexual Orientation	10	19
*Other	9	15

*Parental Status, Marital Status, Religion, and Gender Identity

Note: Individual cases may involve more than one protected class

Cases closed by type of case

	2004	2005
Employment:	49%	54%
Housing:	30%	29%
Public Accommodations	21%	17%

Cases closed by type of closure

	2004	2005
No Cause	118	133
Settlements	55	40
Administrative Closures	46	50
Total	219	223



Dollar amount received by charging parties through SOCR's settlement negotiations

	2004	2005
Employment	\$81,754	\$53,500
Housing	\$ 4,212	\$15,165
Public Accommodations	\$ 3,750	\$22,897
Total	\$89,716	\$91,562

Better communication highlights customer service improvements

At SOCR, we recognize that the process can be daunting for charging parties and respondents alike. In 2005-06, SOCR introduced a series of measures to improve customer service. We've shortened the number of days we take to draw up charges and assign cases for investigation. Our investigators check in more frequently with customers to inform them of case progress. They take time to explain complex issues in plain language. As always, we provide professional interpreters free-of-charge on request to customers who speak other languages other than English. SOCR's policies and procedures are summarized in our pamphlet, "Customer Service – Our Commitment."

Information and referral

Many people who contact SOCR need services far beyond our scope. A tenant-landlord dispute may not be discrimination, but it may still be a crisis. In 2005-06, SOCR developed a new set of six "Info Cards" that provide information on topics such as employment, housing, immigration, health and human services, disabilities, education, domestic violence and public safety. Our reception and intake staff provide callers and walk-in visitors with contact names or referrals, so customers leave our office with resources.

We are fair and impartial:

SOCR is a neutral, fact-finding agency.

We do not provide legal representation, nor do we advocate for individuals or businesses.

We do not take sides in an investigation.

We base all our determinations on available evidence.

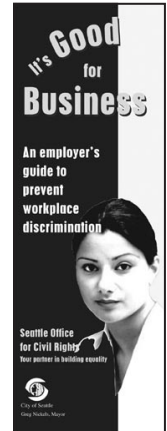
Working for Social Justice

Policy and outreach

SOCR's Policy and Outreach staff tackle a wide range of issues: from outreach to long-term policy analysis. Here are some of our major initiatives since 2004:

Creating a discrimination-free workplace

In 2004 SOCR designed and conducted free workplace trainings for small businesses, organizations and City departments, focusing on issues such as sexual harassment, disability accommodations and employing non-citizens.



Fair housing and home ownership

Following our earlier work on predatory lending, SOCR commissioned the National Fair Housing Institute to conduct a study of mortgage lending in the Puget Sound region. Based on Home Mortgage Disclosure Act (HMDA) data, the study showed clear differences in lending practices based on race and national origin. SOCR convened two all-day workshops in 2004 and 2005 with mortgage lenders and housing advocates to review the report's findings. As part of the study, SOCR arranged for a number of tests to be conducted among mortgage customers initiating the loan process, but did not find evidence of discrimination.

SOCR and the Fair Housing Partners of Washington State also developed and taught a new 3-hour class on "Fair Housing for Real Estate Professionals." The curriculum was based on our new publication, "Fair Housing for Real Estate Industry Professionals - Top 100 Frequently Asked Questions & Answers."

Fair housing in the news

In April 2005, the Seattle Office for Civil Rights found itself on local and national TV news after quick action helped a dying Seattle resident remain in her home. Jennifer H. received a 20-day lease-termination notice from her landlord, though she was in the final stage of terminal colon cancer and was not physically able to relocate. SOCR conducted an expedited investigation and issued a finding of unlawful discrimination based on disability. With an eviction trial date looming, SOCR negotiated a settlement between the tenant and the owner that guaranteed Ms. H's right to remain in her apartment for the duration of her illness. The landlord also paid Ms. H. \$2,000.

Public education about ADA, service animals

In 2005, SOCR developed a comprehensive internal website to help City of Seattle departments provide better services to Seattle residents with disabilities. Many of the materials also are available to the general public on SOCR's web site.

SOCR also developed a new brochure for small businesses, "*Animals Working: A guide to service animals in public places*," that explains rules about service animals. We also designed a wallet card version for people who use service animals.



2005: Hablamos tu idioma / We speak your language

In 2005, SOCR introduced a Spanish-language version of its web site. SOCR also offers information in nine other languages, both on the web and in print: Chinese, Vietnamese, Cambodian, Korean, Russian, Amharic, Tigrinya, Oromo and Somali.

A new report on "Housing Segregation in Seattle"

SOCR released "Housing Segregation in Seattle: 1976-2005." The new report draws a clear picture of the city's shifting residential patterns, and illustrates the complex relationships between housing, the economy and race.

Sexual orientation protected statewide from discrimination

Washington made history when it became the 16th state to bar discrimination based on sexual orientation during the 2005/06 legislative session. SOCR prepared detailed written materials for legislators summarizing Seattle's thirty years' experience with a similar law on the books, as well as background materials covering other jurisdictions across the country.

Every year, SOCR supports the City's state legislative agenda in civil and human rights.



City of Seattle Race and Social Justice Initiative

In 2004, Seattle Mayor Greg Nickels asked the Office for Civil Rights to coordinate his Race and Social Justice Initiative, a citywide effort to end institutionalized racism in Seattle City government and to create a community that is enriched by its diverse cultures.

To implement the Initiative, SOCR developed a multi-pronged approach:

- All City departments implement their own annual Race and Social Justice work plans that focus on their own lines of business. Department directors are directly accountable to the Mayor for implementing work plans.
- Within all City departments, Change Teams (small groups of employees) support each department's RSJI activities.

- A Core Team (about 30 people representing most departments) works on Citywide RSJ issues and provide training and facilitation.

Much of the Initiative's efforts focus on five Citywide concerns:

- Workforce equity
- Economic equity
- Public engagement
- Capacity building and
- Immigrant and refugee access to services.

As the City's efforts begin to bear fruit, Seattle residents should expect to see:

- Hiring and promotion of employees who represent Seattle's cultural and ethnic diversity.
- Equitably increasing the amount of business the City does with businesses owned by people of color.
- Making City policy decisions that reflect our diversity.
- Using race and social justice as a standard for good business practice and government action.



“ Fairness and inclusion are the cornerstones of my priorities for the City of Seattle. All of us who work in City government have a role to play in achieving race and social justice for everyone. ”

– Mayor Greg Nickels



Commissions

The Seattle Office for Civil Rights staffs three independent commissions that advise the Mayor and City Council:

The Seattle Human Rights Commission (SHRC) educates the public and advocates for human and civil rights.

The Seattle Women's Commission (SWC) recommends policies, legislation and programs concerning women.

The Seattle Commission for Sexual Minorities (SCSM) addresses the concerns of gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender residents of Seattle.

In 2004-2005, the Office for Civil Rights co-sponsored a number of events with the Commissions:

An all-day conference on homelessness in Seattle

- (Seattle Human Rights Commission)
- The third Seattle Women's Summit (Seattle Women's Commission)
- The Queer Youth Forum (Seattle Commission for Sexual Minorities).

Human Rights Day: A Ten Year Celebration

In 1996, the Seattle Office for Civil Rights commemorated the signing of the United Nations' Universal Declaration of Human Rights on December 10, 1948. For the last ten years, SOCR, the Seattle Human Rights Commission and other partners have continued to present Seattle Human Rights Day in December.

Human Rights Day has given Seattle residents the chance to hear from an impressive array of nationally renowned guest speakers. In addition, the annual Distinguished Citizen Awards for Human Rights have recognized local individuals and community groups for their outstanding work in furthering human rights for the people of Seattle.

Here is a look back at the first decade of Seattle Human Rights Day:

	Guest Speakers	Award Honorees
1996	Prof. Charles Jones	Jeri Ware
1997	Living Voices Dr. Mona Lake Jones	Jan Kumasaka
1998	Shirley Wilcher	Kay Bullitt
1999	Lakota Hardin	Dr. Hubert Locke Refugee Women's Alliance
2000	Randall Robinson	Institute for Community Leadership
2001	Loung Ung	Patricia Champion
2002	Living Voices	Emma Moreno Hate Free Zone Campaign WA
2003	Sherman Alexie	Gerard John Sheehan Seattle Indian Services Committee
2004	Dr. Peggy McIntosh	Tyree Scott (in memoriam) Wing Luke Asian Museum
2005	Dr. Joy Leary	L. Charles Jones People's Institute Northwest





Central Building
810 Third Avenue, Suite 750
Seattle, WA 98104-1627
206-684-4500
TTY 206-684-4503

www.seattle.gov/civilrights

**In the City of Seattle it is illegal
to discriminate based on:**

- Age
- Sex
- Race
- Color
- Creed
- Religion
- Ancestry
- Disability
- Marital status
- Parental status
- National origin
- Gender identity
- Political ideology
- Sexual orientation
- Use of a service animal
- Use of a Section 8 certificate

**The law also protects you from
harassment and retaliation.**



**You can find this report and all materials mentioned on our web site. Visit us at www.seattle.gov/civilrights
Information will be made available on request to accommodate people with disabilities and those who need language translation.**

Written by: Elliott Bronstein
Designed by: Rivera Design

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